SouthernLINC Wireless
Media Coverage 2005-2006

RE: Rural Coverage & Emergency Response

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Georgia Calls On SouthernLINC Wireless

BY SUSAN RUSH
MARCH 1, 2005
NEWS@2 DIRECT

SouthernLINC Wireless has won a contract to operate as an official communications supplier for the state of Georgia.

As part of the deal, SouthernLINC Wireless will deliver its Motorola iDEN technology-based wireless services, including InstantLINC Mobile to Mobile, phone service, text messaging and data access. The state is using SouthernLINC as part of its efforts to manage bio-terrorism and public health emergencies.

"The state of Georgia has relied on SouthernLINC Wireless to keep state agencies and public entities connected during crucial events in Georgia's recent history. We look forward to providing a reliable day-to-day communications in both urban and rural areas of the state," said Bob Dawson, president and CEO of SouthernLINC Wireless.

SouthernLINC Wireless was formerly known as Southern LINC.

Last week, Verizon Wireless announced contract with the state of Georgia to provide wireless voice and data services to the state's government agencies, including at the local and county levels. At the time of the announcement, state officials said they are working with Verizon Wireless in an effort to deliver technology to outlining areas of Georgia, which in turn should help boost economic activity in the state.

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Savannah (GA) Morning News

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Headline: Savannah 40 Featured Stock

Source Web Page: http://www.savannahnow.com/stories/030205/2845148.shtml
State gives Southern contract

SouthernLINC Wireless, the wireless communications service from **Southern Co**. (NYSE: SO), said Tuesday that it has been selected as an official communications supplier by the state of Georgia. The deal solidifies a contract-based relationship that began in 1998. The Georgia Technology Authority (GTA), which is responsible for evaluating and recommending sound technology systems for the state of Georgia, chose **SouthernLINC Wireless** for its interoperability, consistently powerful coverage throughout the state and depth of experience with public service entities.

From staff and wire reports

ATLANTA JOURNAL–
CONSTITUTION
ATLANTA, GA
DAILY 400,893
MAR 04 2005

State enlists SouthernLINC

SouthernLINC Wireless, the wireless communications service from Southern Co., has been selected as an official communications supplier by the state of Georgia.

The service is used by the Georgia Emergency Management Agency during natural disasters, and the Georgia Department of Human Resources to support their efforts in managing bioterrorism and public health emergencies.

"We are honored that the state of Georgia continues to choose SouthernLINC Wireless to get the job done," said Bob Dawson, president and CEO of SouthernLINC Wireless.

— Staff report

WIRELESSIQ.INFO

Story as compiled from WirelessIQ
www.wirelessiq.info

SouthernLINC Wireless and State of Georgia Ink Partnership

March 1, 2005 | 10:17 AM

State Chooses Hometown Provider Upholding Proven Alliance

SouthernLINC Wireless, the wireless communications service from Southern Company, today announced that it has been selected as an official communications supplier by the state of Georgia. The deal solidifies a contract-based relationship that began in 1998.

The service has proven to be a vital component in the efforts of the Georgia Emergency Management Agency (GEMA) during natural disasters, and the Georgia Department of Human Resources to support their efforts in managing bioterrorism and public health emergencies. SouthernLINC Wireless was also chosen as the official wireless communication supplier to the G8 Summit in June 2004, where G8 staff relied on SouthernLINC Wireless keep the world's leaders connected at Sea Island, Ga.

"We are honored that the state of Georgia continues to choose SouthernLINC Wireless to get the job done," said Bob Dawson, president and CEO of SouthernLINC Wireless. "The state of Georgia has relied on SouthernLINC Wireless to keep state agencies and public entities connected during crucial events in Georgia's recent history. We look forward to providing a reliable day-to-day communications in both urban and rural areas of the state."

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SouthernLINC Wireless provides integrated services via Motorola's iDEN(r) technology including InstantLINCSM Mobile to Mobile, phone service, text messaging and data access.

CULLMANTIMES

Watching the Skies - Storm spotters on front lines when severe weather hits

Lionel Green
The Cullman Times
Published on: 04-15-2005

Most of the time, storms pass through Cullman County with little fanfare.

But they're watching.

Sometimes storms pass through with the destructive force of a tornado.

And they're watching.

They're always watching.

They're a volunteer group of men and women in the Cullman County Rescue Squad known as storm spotters.

Right now is the peak time for tornadoes. Last year, more than 1,500 twisters touched down, killing 36 people across the country.

"We're the eyes of Cullman County when severe weather comes," said Dave Hollis, the rescue squad's chaplain. "When you can't see it on radar, it's another way to help. We're the eyes of EMA."

EMA is the Emergency Management Agency, and deputy director Kelly Allen is well aware of the importance of storm spotters.

"They're very important," Allen said. "They're the ones that go out and put their lives on the line to spot these storms and report back to us."

Communication vital

Mike Morgan is in charge of the spotters. Also the training officer, Morgan has been serving in the rescue squad since 1989.

"When I joined, they had a spotters team," he said. "It's a whole lot different now. The technology's better, and we've got better communications. Now, we've got our own radar system in EMA and our own dispatcher. Lindsay Rhodes is our dispatcher and she's fantastic."

Every day at 8 a.m. and 4 p.m., Morgan's beeper goes off to inform him of the local forecast. At 4:30 p.m., his beeper reminds him about the national forecast. Morgan also has a cell phone and a Southern Linc radio.

"Communication is No. 1," Morgan said. "It can get pretty hectic. When you got your pager, your cell phone and your radio all going off and you're trying to shift gears ... you need four hands and two mouths."

Spotters have to be members of the rescue squad to join. They attend a National Weather Service training class at Wallace State College, where they learn what to look for in severe weather.

"You learn how to determine the size of hail and how to judge wind speed," said Morgan, adding that spotters have to know how to use chainsaws.

A storm is coming

When the weather looks threatening, the storm spotters are activated. Three teams of two drive to strategic points in the county -- usually northern, central and southern locations. Either Morgan or rescue squad Capt. Tim Willis stay at the local EMA headquarters to pass along the spotter reports.

Spotters in the field choose vantage points that offer a clear view of the sky. They rely on their eyes from that point. At night they use lightning to view the clouds, hoping the intermittent flashes will give them enough of a glimpse to do their jobs. Morgan said spotters will use anything they can to get a feel for the approaching weather -- whether it's watching how a flag is flapping in the wind or how a flock of sheep are acting because "animals have a sense about weather."

"We're looking for any change in the weather," Morgan said. "Wind, sleet, hail, rain. We watch the cloud formations, constantly looking for rotation. If it's raining and lightning real hard and then gets still, something's about to happen. We report back what we're seeing to EMA. If EMA spots something on radar that looks like it's forming into something, we go check it out. EMA warns us if they see something coming our way."

Two weather events -- wall clouds and funnel clouds -- are particularly ominous signs that tornadoes could touch down. Wall clouds are dark clouds bulging down from thunderstorm cells and are where tornadoes typically form. Funnel clouds are tornadoes in the sky that do not have a visible portion reaching the ground.

When Morgan drives a newspaper reporter to a high spot in the Piney Grove community where spotters watch storms, he points out all the shelters along the way.

"We keep an eye out for storm pits," Morgan said. "I generally know about every storm pit in the community."

Oddly enough, Morgan is afraid of storms. It's true. The fearless leader of the storm spotters has a fear of storms.

"I think I got that from my daddy," he said. "If he heard a clap of thunder, we were in the storm pit. I'm scared to death of storms, but I'd rather be out in it than at EMA watching the radar."

Morgan said Cullman County residents should always be wary when Tuscaloosa, Walker and Winston counties have severe weather ("That's on our track"). He remembered the deadly twister that ripped apart Joppa in 1995. That was the worst storm he could recall.

"I was on the west side of the county and followed it all the way across the county," he said. "I went out to Joppa with an ambulance. Me and Brian Drake went inside an old store building and got two people out. That building was almost falling in."

Of his first time out as a spotter in 1989, Morgan said, "We spotted five tornadoes in the air in West Point."

Spotters never know exactly how long they'll be out during a storm. A supply of Little Debbie cakes and peanut butter crackers are popular snacks to sustain them in case of a long night. Morgan has to have his Dr. Pepper with him. Hollis has "got to have his caffeine" and tries to keep Mountain Dew and coffee close by.

Why they do it

Spotters have their own reasons for volunteering for the job, but helping people is the No. 1 motivation.

Kenny Barnett has been a spotter for six months.

"I just kind of wanted to help out and be out there and be a part of something that's important," he said.

Brad Garmon initially joined for the excitement.

"At first, it was kind of a thrill going out and spotting storms," he said. "But it's more. It's getting out and helping your community. Lives are at stake. Pretty much it's the safety of the community ... that's my biggest push."

More often than not, though, storms never develop into tornadoes. Hollis said the danger then becomes complacency.

"I've heard some people relate it to the boy who cried wolf," Hollis said. "But you can't get a false security, thinking nothing's going to happen."

Some of the spotters said the adrenaline gets pumping before a storm rolls through the

county. When nothing happens, it can be a bit of a letdown. Spotting storms is not like the nonstop action in the 1996 movie "Twister" (which, by the way, they all enjoyed watching).

"It is frustrating to a point," Hollis said. "But it's relieving to know nothing happened and nobody got hurt."

"Even if it's nothing but mist or rain, I'd rather be out there just in case something did happen," Morgan said.

"It's definitely exciting," Barnett said. "It's adrenalin-pumping. If you've never rode in an ambulance when the wind kicks up, you ain't been on a ride."

"It's like being on the Scrambler at the fair," Morgan added.

Garmon said winding down is tough for him.

"The toughest part is probably getting calmed down afterwards," he said. "You get home and get in bed, but you can't get wound down."

"The toughest part for me is the unknown," Hollis said. "Is it in this cell or the next one?"

No thanks necessary

Fifteen of the 26 rescue squad members are spotters. The group is not only used for severe thunderstorms, but for ice and snow events as well. During Hurricane Ivan, they transported several people to emergency shelters.

What are the benefits of being a spotter? Considering it pays nothing and the hours can be unpredictable, the job seems more of a headache than it's worth. But these men and women don't do it for the kudos.

"It's not about the thanks," Hollis said. "It's deeper than that. It's a personal satisfaction."

Occasionally, the public will show its appreciation for spotters in small ways -- whether it's a convenience store giving them a cup of coffee or someone feeding them a plate of ribs.

"Not a lot of people know we're out here," Morgan said. "We appreciate those people who notice."

RCR wireless news

Cover Story

Carriers make slow progress to repair networks

By Dan Meyer
Sep 2, 2005

The wireless industry continues to struggle with service outages in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, which devastated the Gulf Coast region when it came ashore Aug. 29, but by late last week, carriers appeared to be making some progress. News reports indicated that wireless services were severed almost completely in many communities due to power outages caused by wind and flood damage following the catastrophic fury of the hurricane.

By the end of last week, several operators had managed to repair networks in many areas away from the Gulf Coast region that did not suffer as much flooding, but were still having difficulties in and around New Orleans. Reports indicated that wireless customers successfully were placing calls or sending and receiving text messages, but there were still issues with receiving calls in many areas.

Analysts noted local agencies likely would place more emphasis on getting wireline services up and running in the hardest-hit locations to support 911 services, but that wireless carriers would be aggressive in getting their networks back online as quickly as possible.

"I think the wireline networks will be the first priority, but the wireless carriers can expedite their progress by working together and at least getting basic voice service up and running as fast as possible," said Visant Strategies senior analyst Larry Swasey. "Those networks have become very important for emergency and police, and the carriers will likely provide priority access for those needs in the short term."

T-Mobile USA Inc. said more than 80 percent of its coverage was operational in the Mobile, Ala., area and more than 40 percent was operational in the Hattiesburg, Miss., and surrounding Gulf Coast region. The carrier still was having trouble in the New

Orleans area, where it said it had 50 percent of its coverage was operational, but that downtown New Orleans was still experiencing limited services as engineering crews were not yet able to reach cell sites.

T-Mobile USA noted that its switching center in New Orleans remained operational throughout the hurricane, and that as of last Wednesday, it was processing more than 1 million calls per day in and out of New Orleans.

Sprint Nextel Corp. said it was sending hundreds of engineers and technicians, as well as nearly two dozen vehicles into the area, but it cannot reach many sites until it is deemed safe.

"Obviously we must wait until it is safe to move into the area, but once it is safe to do so, our customers can count on us being there for them," said Sal Todaro, Sprint Nextel's area vice president. "There will be many power issues to deal with, and we want to reassure our customers that we will put forth an effort second to none in recovering from this devastating storm."

The carrier added that many wireless sites that relied on battery backup have failed and will have to wait until it is safe for generators and personnel to recharge the batteries to turn the sites back on.

"Our equipment needs power to work, and while many sites have backup generators or batteries, some of those sites may be flooded," Todaro added. "Also there are issues where other carriers to whom we connect might be out of service. It is a complex issue, but we have the people and assets in place to respond as quickly as humanly possible."

Sprint Nextel noted that a switch located below sea level in the New Orleans area reported flooding and had to be shut down, impacting long-distance calls into and out of the area.

The carrier also noted that the network issues have impacted customers as far away as the Florida Panhandle because long-distance service is typically directed through New Orleans.

Cingular Wireless L.L.C. said it has set up free emergency calls at its open company-owned retail stores in Alabama, Mississippi and Louisiana. The carrier also said it plans to deploy mobile calling vans in the area, providing free phone calls.

The carrier said it has emergency crews in the area that are beginning to survey cell-site outages, but noted that they have limited access to those sites due to blocked roads and unsafe conditions. Cingular added that it has more than 500 generators ready to be dispatched as soon as conditions allow, as well as more than 240,000 gallons of fuel for those generators.

Verizon Wireless said it had managed to restore service to many parts of the Gulf Coast as engineers were able to gain access to impacted areas. The carrier noted that by last Thursday it also had restored service at New Orleans' Louis Armstrong International airport, which had become a staging area for the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

Regional operators also reported significant progress.

Cellular South Inc. said some of its network in Mississippi was still operational, and according to a spokeswoman, was the only wireless or wireline communications network still operating in many areas. The carrier said it took extra precautions prior to the hurricane hitting, including deploying generators, and has deployed temporary towers in many areas. Cellular South noted that it was providing emergency response personnel priority access to its network and asking customers to place only emergency calls on the network or use text messages, which place less demand on the network.

Regional iDEN operator SouthernLinc also reported significant improvements across its network with 98 percent of its sites across Alabama, Georgia, Florida and Mississippi operational by last Thursday.

With the short-term focus on just getting wireless networks back on-air, Swasey noted the long-term impact could last up to a year.

"It could take at least three months just to rebuild the systems in the hardest-hit areas, and that will be just getting the network operational," Swasey said. "There are also problems

with customers having likely lost their handsets in the flooding and the possibility of an increase in bankruptcy filings that will impact the back-office and billing systems for carriers. It might be a year before everything is back to normal."

WIRELESSIQ

OFF THE WIRE

SouthernLINC Completely Operational After Hurricane Katrina

September 9, 2005 | 11:29 AM

SouthernLINC Wireless, a Southern Company, announced today that as of September 1, 98 percent of its sites were up and operational, and as of September 8, all existing sites are on air with two additional sites operating, providing much needed wireless communication service in Alabama, Georgia, Florida and Mississippi for emergency, utility and government personnel continuing relief and rescue efforts, as well as individuals trying to connect with loved ones.

"The fact that SouthernLINC Wireless had nearly all of its sites up and running, just days after one of the most powerful hurricanes hit the region, while most other telecommunications services were still reported as nonfunctional, is a powerful testament to the strength of our infrastructure," said Bob Dawson, president and CEO of SouthernLINC Wireless. "SouthernLINC Wireless' infrastructure was designed specifically to withstand stressful weather conditions in the Southeast, including hurricanes."

Along with SouthernLINC's superior infrastructure, the company has employees who live in the communities affected that were waiting to address any system issues immediately and were able to work closely with critical customers to find solutions to meet their communications needs quickly. In addition, employees were able to use a unique product offering, personal toll free numbers, to allow critical customers to bypass a problem caused by the local phone-network in the 228 calling area.

When an issue was identified with calls placed to the 228 area code due to a problem with the local phone network, SouthernLINC Wireless was able to provision its Mississippi Power and public safety customers with toll free numbers. By doing so, their SouthernLINC phones were able to receive phone calls from non-SouthernLINC Wireless customers. InstantLINC and mobile-to-mobile calls were not affected by the local phone network problems, and emergency officials were able to focus on saving lives by staying connected and Mississippi Power could focus on restoring electrical service in the area.

"Prior to Hurricane Katrina hitting the Gulf Coast and then moving through Alabama, SouthernLINC Wireless prepared for the worst by ensuring that generators at our sites were topped off with fuel, and additional generators were available to be mobilized to sites that were operating on batteries due to power outages," said Dawson. "We also had employees on hand to begin restoration efforts as soon as the storm moved through. They were able to access many of the affected sites immediately after the storm passed to assess and repair damage quickly."

SouthernLINC Wireless, a Southern Company, is an Atlanta-based regional wireless carrier covering the major metro and rural areas in Alabama, Georgia, southeastern Mississippi and northwest Florida. SouthernLINC Wireless bundles multiple communication options into one phone including InstantLINC Mobile to Mobile, cellular service, text messaging, wireless Internet access and wireless data.

Associated Press

Southern Co. unit operations restored
158 words
9 September 2005
10:00
Associated Press Newswires
English

ATLANTA (AP) - **SouthernLINC** Wireless, a unit of electricity distributor Southern Co., on Friday said its operations have been completely restored following Hurricane Katrina.

The Atlanta-based regional wireless carrier said all of its sites are on air, along with two additional sites, to provide service in Alabama, Georgia, Florida and Mississippi.

"Prior to Hurricane Katrina hitting the Gulf Coast and then moving through Alabama, **SouthernLINC** Wireless prepared for the worst by ensuring that generators at our sites were topped off with fuel, and additional generators were available to be mobilized to sites that were operating on batteries due to power outages," said Bob Dawson, **SouthernLINC** president and chief executive, in a statement.

The company said it restored all service on Thursday, and had already restored 98 percent of its sites as of Sept. 1.

Southern Co. shares rose 4 cents to $35.17 in morning trading on the New York Stock Exchange.

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www.wirelessweek.com

Wireless Carriers Progress in Restoration Efforts

By Susan Rush
September 9, 2005

Hurricane Katrina remains a focus of wireless carriers operating in the Gulf states, with the operators making progress in their comm service to the area.

SouthernLINC Wireless is reporting that its network is nearly 100 percent operational in Alabama, Georgia, Florida and Mississippi. Fc customers in the 228 calling area, SouthernLINC has been providing personal toll-free numbers, basically provisioning its Mississippi safety customers with toll-free numbers to enable these customers to receive phone calls from non-SouthernLINC Wireless customer

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS/ATLANTA

Southern Co. unit operations restored

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Headline: Southern Company Releases Crews to Aid Other Utilities

Source Web Page: http://www.wtoctv.com/Global/story.asp?S=3855022
Southern Company Releases Crews to Aid Other Utilities

ATLANTA, Sept. 15 /PRNewswire-FirstCall/ -- After restoring power to all of its customers who could accept power on Saturday, Sept. 10, Southern Company has been releasing contract crews to help Entergy and other neighboring utilities restore electric service in the Gulf Coast region.

(Logo: http://www.newscom.com/cgi-bin/prnh/20020207/SOCOLOGO)

"Although our coastal customers in the Florida Panhandle, Alabama and, in particular, Mississippi, suffered the worst storm damage in the company's history in the wake of Hurricane Katrina, we have completed the process of restoring power to those customers whose homes and businesses can accept power," said Southern Company Chairman and CEO David Ratcliffe. "Our thoughts are with our customers and those of our neighboring utilities who continue to experience the damage of Hurricane Katrina.

"Facing unprecedented damage to its distribution system, Southern Company and neighboring utilities along the Gulf Coast region continue to face dangerous and difficult working conditions in Mississippi and southeast Louisiana. Our goal is to assist our neighbors, in any way we can, through this difficult restoration process."

Katrina left 971,000 of Southern Company's 4.2 million customers without power. Mississippi Power's entire customer base of 195,000 was included in those outages. In 12 days, every Southern Company customer whose home or business could accept power was restored to service.

"Last September, Hurricane Ivan took out power to 1.6 million of our customers in Florida, Mississippi, Alabama and Georgia. We called that the worst storm in the history of our company. Although our outage numbers were higher with Ivan, Katrina was a far more destructive storm than the outage numbers indicate," Ratcliffe said.

Storm preparation helped Southern Company recover in just 13 days after Ivan struck the company's entire Southeastern footprint, and in just 12 days after Katrina hit.

"Our employees did a great job of planning and preparing for this storm, as they do for every storm. We were ready to begin our damage and outage assessments and the process of restoration as soon as Katrina had passed.

"We also received great help from thousands of workers from many utilities, who did a great job. They came from Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, Mississippi, Oklahoma, Kentucky, Michigan, Texas, Tennessee, North Carolina, Illinois, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Connecticut, Indiana, Missouri, Maryland, South Carolina, Massachusetts, New Mexico, Alabama, New

Hampshire, Georgia, Florida and Canada. We also appreciate the patience of our customers, who have suffered terrible losses," Ratcliffe said.

"We were extremely fortunate to have our **SouthernLINC Wireless** system available to us for communicating with our employees and crews working along the Coast. In many cases, **SouthernLINC Wireless** was the only communications source available. Within days of the storm nearly 2,500 phones were activated for use by government agencies and public service entities.

"I also am very proud of our employees for their assistance in helping co- workers who suffered personal loss during this time. We activated our Southern Company Family Services program after the storm hit. More than 200 employees and volunteers from across the Southern Company system went to Mississippi to relieve Mississippi Power employees from having to deal with personal tasks, such as emergency repairs and clean-up of their homes, while working their disaster assignments. This enabled us to get the lights back on faster.

"These employees are doing everything from removing trees from homes and driveways and salvaging employees' personal belongings, to babysitting and laundry. It is simply amazing to see the way we've all pulled together to help our fellow employees get through this tragedy.

"We also have had tremendous results from our Employee Relief Effort, where employees are able to make tax deductible contributions to help their fellow employees. These donations will help cover losses that insurance does not cover and will pay for day-to-day expenses during the recovery period," Ratcliffe said.

Southern Company also transported temporary vehicles to employees who lost theirs in the storm, and temporary housing for those whose homes were rendered uninhabitable by Katrina. Employees with available housing are offering it to co-workers as well.

"We have for many years conducted business by a set of values that we call Southern Style. In a nutshell, Southern Style is unquestionable trust, superior performance and total commitment. It is evident during times like this that these values extend beyond the workplace," Ratcliffe said.

With more than 4 million customers and nearly 39,000 megawatts of generating capacity, Atlanta-based Southern Company is the premier super-regional energy company in the Southeast and a leading U.S. producer of electricity. Southern Company owns electric utilities in four states, a growing competitive generation company and a competitive retail natural gas business, as well as fiber optics and wireless communications. Southern Company brands are known for excellent customer service, high reliability and retail electric prices that are 15 percent below the national average. Southern Company has been ranked the nation's top energy utility in the American Customer Satisfaction Index six years in a row. Southern Company has more than 500,000 shareholders, making its common stock one of the most widely held in the United States. Visit the Southern Company Web site at www.southerncompany.com.

CONTACT: Media, Terri McCullough of Southern Company, +1-404-506-5333, or+1-866-506-5333, or media@southerncompany.com

Web site: http://www.southerncompany.com//

RCR Wireless News

Cover Story

Hurricane's financial, physical impact on carriers in limbo

By Dan Meyer
Sep 9, 2005

Wireless carriers reported significant progress in restoring service to areas along the Gulf Coast ravaged by Hurricane Katrina late last month, though the long-term financial impact on operators could be felt for years.

"I definitely expect some sort of financial impact due to the severity of the storm, but it will likely take some time to gather a full scope of that impact," said American Technology Research analyst Albert Lin. "Carriers will have to figure out if hurricane-related damages can be a one-time charge or if they will be forced to spread it out over several quarters."

Cingular Wireless L.L.C. said it was too early to discuss monetary damages, but parent company BellSouth Corp. released initial financial estimates of between $400 million and $600 million for both capital and expenses for network restoration.

BellSouth estimated that 810,000 lines remain impacted in the hardest-hit areas of the Gulf Coast. The company noted that 19 of its 131 central offices in the area still were not operating, and that those 19 offices served about 187,000 access lines, including 166,000 lines in the New Orleans area.

BellSouth Chief Technology Officer Bill Smith noted some communities-including New Orleans-could take longer than a month to rebuild in certain cases, depending on when residents and businesses are able to return to those areas and the time it takes to rebuild needed local infrastructure.

"New Orleans is an atypical situation given the floodwaters and access issues, and because of this, we will track restoration activity in New Orleans separately," Smith added.

Merrill Lynch telecommunications analyst David Janazzo noted BellSouth could see a near-term financial impact related to the hurricane, but that he thought long-term implications would be limited.

"We estimate a possible longer term revenue impact of about 4 cents per share on an annualized basis, or about 2 percent of our 2006 [earnings per share] estimates, due to longer-term impairments primarily in New Orleans," Janazzo said.

Regional operator Cellular South also said it was a bit early for a full financial analysis of the hurricane's impact, but Sherry Stegall, company vice president of finance, said initial estimates put restoration costs at between $8 million and $12 million.

"We are fully insured for most of that and expect to file claims shortly," Stegall said.

Cellular South said it had nearly 300 cell sites in the impacted areas of Southern Mississippi and that it expected to have all of its sites back online by early this week. Stegall added that Cellular South's network had seen a significant increase in roaming traffic and resulting revenue as it was the only available CDMA-based network in the area. That could help offset some of the network restoration costs.

"We have seen a positive impact on roaming revenues," Stegall noted.

ATR's Lin added that carrier estimates could be a bit tricky to pin down as most will have to deal with outside circumstances that will impact rebuilding costs.

"I think costs associated with rebuilding will be higher than expected as there could be a labor shortage in many of the areas needing to be rebuilt," Lin

explained. "This does not happen in a vacuum and companies will have to deal with the physical realities of the situation."

Lin also questioned the speed in which carriers will need to rebuild their networks as some areas would be uninhabitable for some time. Once companies finally are able to return, they also might not need as many telecommunications resources due to slowing business and a loss of population as some evacuees might not return.

"Carriers will also have to decide on the pace of rebuilding their networks," Lin said. "It's good to be able to say they have their networks back up to pre-hurricane levels, but with so many people and companies having been displaced due to the storm, will it make sense to rebuild the networks back to those levels in the short-term.

Cellular South's Stegall said that unlike some of the areas impacted by the hurricane, the carrier was already seeing people anxious to return to the Mississippi Gulf Coast in hopes of resuming their lives.

"A lot of these people are really motivated, and we want to be there for them when they do return," Stegall said.

Carriers have generally reported substantial progress in areas outside of New Orleans, though most continue to struggle in the Big Easy due to power and safety issues.

- Cingular reported that 75 percent of overall service had been restored in the areas hit by the hurricane as of Sept. 8, with full restoration in many places, including Mobile, Ala.; Jackson and Meridian, Miss.; and Hammond and Houma, La. The carrier added that service had been substantially restored in Hattiesburg, Biloxi and Gulfport, Miss.

  Cingular also noted that it had restored 50 percent of service in New Orleans as of Sept. 8 and that it expects to have 75 percent restored by

last weekend. The carrier added that calls continue to go through in the city and surrounding areas, but at reduced levels.

- Verizon Wireless reported similar progress in restoring service in Alabama and the Florida Panhandle, with pockets of limited coverage remaining in Mississippi. The carrier also said it had turned on cell sites in the southern section of New Orleans, Hammond and on the North Shore of Lake Pontchartrain.

- Sprint Nextel Corp. said wireless service had been restored in Alabama, more than 80 percent of Mississippi and more than 60 percent in Louisiana, though it was still facing challenges in New Orleans. The carrier also said it was rerouting long-distance traffic previously served by a switch in New Orleans for customers in portions of Louisiana, Alabama, Florida and Mississippi, thus enabling callers to make long-distance calls.

- T-Mobile USA Inc. said it had restored wireless service to a "significant level" in New Orleans, and that it had a high-capacity cell site running on generator power on top of the Crowne Plaza Hotel Astor on Canal Street. The carrier added that service now is available from many areas across downtown New Orleans as well as at the airport, and that it is enabling virtually all users of GSM phones roaming access to its network in the area.

- Alltel Corp. said 90 percent of its wireless network in Mississippi was online as of Sept. 8, and more than half was online in New Orleans and southern Louisiana area. The company also said that it was working on restoring wireline services to 135 access lines in parts of Mississippi.

- SouthernLinc said all of its 129 sites in Alabama, Florida and Mississippi were operational as of Sept. 8 and that 98 percent of its sites were back online within days of the hurricane making landfall.

- Nextel Partners Inc. said it had restored more than 85 percent of its wireless services in the area impacted by the hurricane as of Sept. 6.

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Local, state communication systems must be upgraded

Meltdown.

There's no better way to describe what happened to communication systems throughout the Pine Belt during and after Hurricane Katrina.

The consequences were enormous.

Emergency management officials lost their ability to communicate with one another - and with law enforcement, hospitals, state officials and relief organizations.

The limited communication that was exchanged occurred over a handful of satellite phones, which were impervious to the damage that wrecked traditional communication lines.

Of all the failures that occurred during the storm, the near-total decimation of our communication system is the most alarming.

And, of all the issues that must be addressed, this one is arguably the top priority as we prepare to weather the next disaster.

Ironically, the week of the storm, a 16-member legislative commission - created earlier this year to help establish a statewide communication system - was scheduled to hear presentations from telecommunications companies that were bidding for the job.

This process needs to move forward with all due haste.

Come January - or possibly even before, in a special legislative session - Mississippi lawmakers need to select a vendor, appropriate funds and purchase a communication system that addresses our state's critical communication needs.

"We're looking for a system that will hold up during a hurricane - or one that can be restored quickly to operation," says Sen. Tom King, R-Petal, a member of the commission and a principle author of the telecommunications bill.

One of the few - albeit major - success stories during this disaster has been the performance of Mississippi Power Co.

Despite the fact its transmission grid was ravaged by Katrina, Mississippi Power - which serves hundreds of thousands of residents in South Mississippi - was able to restore electricity to all the homes that could receive it within two weeks of the storm. (The exception? An estimated 26,000 customers whose homes were so severely damaged it is impossible to restore power.)

What made this possible?

Mississippi Power's communications company - **SouthernLINC** Telecommunications - restored full communication for Mississippi Power within 48 hours.

"This proved invaluable," said Kurt Brautigam, manager of external communications for Mississippi Power. "We couldn't have restored power as quickly as we did without the ability to communicate with our people in the field."

By Brautigam's estimation, 25 percent to 50 percent of the company's communication system was knocked out by the hurricane.

In a disaster of this magnitude, the ability to communicate is literally the lifeblood of disaster relief and recovery.

It is imperative that state and local officials establish a reliable statewide communication system.

Optimize
Ideas. Action. Results.

Katrina's Wrath

By Julia Harwell Segars

October 2005, Issue 22

An hour-by-hour account of Alabama Power's preparedness strategy during one of our nation's worst natural disasters

You can do all the disaster-recovery planning in the world, but the plan must work when nearly 25% of your 4 million customers are out of power and you're trying to account for all of your employees. That was the case at Southern Company—a group of power utilities across four Gulf Coast states—the day after Hurricane Katrina flooded our coastal region, leaving thousands of residents homeless and all of our Mississippi Power customers without electricity.

As CIO for Alabama Power and Southern Nuclear, I am one of five regional CIOs working across Southern Company's four-state region—encompassing Alabama, Georgia, and parts of Florida and Mississippi—reporting to our senior VP and CIO, Becky Blalock. Our CIO for Mississippi Power and Southern Company transmission and distribution, Aline Ward, was one of many employees personally affected by Katrina's wrath. As she and other company leaders waited out the hurricane in the company's storm center at Watson Electric Generating Plant in Gulfport, Miss., they saw wind and debris bust the windows of their cars in the parking lot below.

But that was just the beginning. Later, 30-foot storm surges submerged the vehicles, rose 20 feet in the plant, and flooded the 50-kilowatt generator that normally would have kicked in when the power failed. The nerve center of the power company had no power.

Evacuation

The next day, Ward and the others trapped at Plant Watson were evacuated to the coastal division office nearby in Gulfport. We had not heard from several Mississippi IT employees, and some couldn't contact family members. Still others lost their homes entirely, or suffered severe flood or tornado damage. But even during their personal

crises, these committed IT employees were working to help get the power back on and to begin giving residents some semblance of normalcy.

Alabama Power's peak outage, which came at 6:30 a.m. on Tuesday, Aug. 30, affected 636,891 residents, almost half of our 1.4 million customers. But when Katrina came ashore near Bay St. Louis, Miss., it also hit the coast of Mobile, Ala., on Monday morning and barreled up the Alabama-Mississippi border into Tennessee. By sheer outage numbers, this storm was the second-largest in the company's history, behind September 2004's Hurricane Ivan (which affected 825,000 customers), but it was the worst on record in damage to the company's infrastructure.

Once the storm hit the coast, Julia Segars, Bill Mintz, and Mark Swindall kept tabs on the severe damage.

Photo by Alabama Power

While Mississippi Power covers a smaller territory, all of its 195,000 customers lost power, and 70% of its 8,000 miles of transmission and distribution lines would have to be rebuilt. This was Ward's territory.

On our IT "critical situation" call Tuesday afternoon, we finally could account for the safety of all IT employees, and got details on their devastating losses. "I haven't been able to get to my house because of damage to the area," Ward said. "But I have been assured my house is gone. I guess I've just got to start over."

Then it was back to the business at hand: providing the infrastructure, telecommunications, applications, and other technology support needed by our companies to get the lights back on. Thanks to some critical planning, tremendous teamwork, and coordination, virtually all Alabama Power outages were restored within nine days. It took another couple of days to restore power to the final 2,000 customers on one barrier island, which required the construction of a new transmission system in Mobile Bay.

Our IT critical-situation process began in 2002 to address cybersecurity attacks and, later, it was adapted to address serious infrastructure and applications problems. It was "dubbed 'crit sit' by the IT team," says Dan Traynor, director of infrastructure services, whose area runs the process. The nature of the emergency determines who serves on the response team. Typically present at the critical-situation meetings during Katrina were Blalock; Dave Coker, VP of computing and network systems; regional CIOs; leadership and representatives from application services; infrastructure services; client services; IT security; representatives of our subsidiary SouthernLINC Wireless; and people from the energy-management system group.

Key elements of crit sit make it effective, adaptable, and repeatable. "At its core is a detailed process with flow diagrams, situational checklists, and criteria for declaring a critical situation," according to Traynor. "There are prescribed intervals for communication, as well as guidelines for media, content, and audiences."

IT's infrastructure-operations center in Atlanta was constructed with crit sit in mind. It contains a situation room complete with large-screen displays, LAN ports for laptops, white boards, and a glass wall that overlooks the monitoring systems.

Traynor's team declared that Katrina was a critical situation ahead of landfall—when it approached Southern Company's service area—to get the process flowing smoothly and enable IT to better coordinate storm preparations. He says that the prep work—including maintenance and fueling of emergency generators; relocating and protecting vulnerable equipment; and staging personnel, tools, and emergency communications gear—helped reduce the impact of the storm.

Once the storm hit the coast, we held three calls a day to assess damage and deploy resources. These calls included reports from the affected regional CIOs, the status of infrastructure components, and reports from field-services employees deployed to repair problems. These included sites running on batteries or generators and concerns about getting fuel to them; inoperable transport sites; and downed SouthernLINC Wireless sites.

SouthernLINC Wireless, a subsidiary based in Atlanta, provides wireless communications for field employees and for many public-safety departments, so it was critical to have those sites up and running quickly. Prior to the storm, SouthernLINC Wireless prepared for the worst by ensuring that generators to their sites were topped off with fuel, and additional generators were on hand. Employees began restoration efforts as soon as the storm moved through, getting to many of the affected sites within hours to assess and repair any damage. Many sites were up the next day and about 98% were running within three days.

I am the interface between IT and our Alabama Power internal customers, including the power-delivery department, which is responsible for determining the location of outages and dispatching the crews that will repair damage and restore service.

One of my responsibilities is to ensure that our IT systems operate 24/7 and 365 days a year. While no systems are perfect, ours must be extremely reliable, especially during storm restoration. One of my first objectives after accepting this position three years ago was to ensure total redundancy of real-time systems in our power-delivery distribution operations center in Birmingham, Ala., because that center can handle other operations if there's a local problem. Over the past three years, we've addressed potential single points of failure in the transport system connecting the distribution operations center to our data center and had a spare dedicated server on site during Katrina to minimize outages.

Our power-delivery teams are pros at tracking weather and predicting outage concentrations before and during a storm, and assembling the resources in advance to tackle the damage once it's safe to do so. During Katrina restoration, crews from 22 states assisted Alabama Power's 2,600 field employees.

Robin Hurst, senior VP of power delivery, said one process Alabama Power operators use to restore service quickly is to cancel, or defeat, the re-close feature on system breakers once severe weather has taken down a line. By doing this, the system "won't try to fix itself after the first outage. If the breaker kept attempting to automatically re-close through its normal cycle, it possibly could burn up conductors and damage equipment. This also helps protect the public," he says.

And since damage to the equipment is minimized, operators often can restore that section of the distribution system with minimal repair. "That's how we restored 230,000 customers on the first day of the last two big storms," Hurst says.

Our results this time are especially impressive compared with Hurricane Frederic in 1979, which took out service to 239,400 Alabama Power customers for 21 days. During Ivan, power to 825,000 customers was restored in eight days.

Real-time intelligence on the health of transmission and distribution systems for all of Southern Company comes from computer applications and supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) system information, which allows monitoring and control of remote substations, switching stations, and other distribution and transmission functions.

Through a system of host servers; communication front-end processors; circuits and data transport; remote terminal units (RTUs); SCADA workstations; and operation consoles, our power-delivery system operators get real-time information that greatly assists them in quickly and safely restoring power. They are responsible for routing and switching electricity remotely to manage system load and help restore outages. Alabama Power has 2,515 RTUs feeding data to 163 master radios, enabling the monitoring of 65,000 status and alarm points.

During Hurricane Ivan

During Hurricane Ivan in 2004, IT worked with power delivery to establish a power-

delivery storm-technology support center to monitor the performance of all these applications. By the time Katrina hit, we had perfected the setup process and already had the technology center up and running two days prior, along with the larger power-delivery storm center, the hub of restoration work.

Scores of Alabama Power workers arrived on the scene and began working to restore service.

Photo by Alabama Power

By Monday morning, when the storm had hit Mobile, flooding our division's corporate-office basement and rising six inches on the first floor, generators were running everywhere. During the day, I worked with power-delivery principal engineer Mark Swindall while he pulled up different views of the hurricane projection on his console and overlaid that information onto our territory maps using a program designed to track hurricane progress. According to Swindall, we could export information about wind bands and overlay on our GIS application. Then we could graph for wind speed and pressure, and compare that to data from previous storms to predict how many utility poles might be down. That allowed us to stay ahead of the game and not wait to assess the damage before responding. Another vital application during the storm was the distribution-outage evaluation system. This application contains an outage-prediction engine and tracks where customers are connected to the electrical distribution system so we can estimate outages based on customer calls and SCADA information received into the system. IT becomes critical to this process because our telecommunications personnel maintains the SCADA master radios. During each critical-situation call, we ran down the list of nonfunctioning SCADA masters, and worked the list just as linemen worked the distribution system.

A third application the power-delivery group uses is an electronic map board, which interfaces with IT's mapping system to put our entire distribution system on a desk screen, letting dispatchers operate the outage-rerouting system remotely. Before this, in 2003, Alabama Power's storm center and its five regional distribution operations centers used giant paper maps and pushpins to track outage work. We can now see the entire

service territory on a desktop, which allows power delivery to transfer switching to other centers at night or when safety concerns require evacuation.

As I was working with the Alabama Power team, Ward, with Mississippi Power, was seeing progress across her state. One helpful technology was the trouble-call management system utilized by several power companies in the region. Because multiple companies share the technology, "we could assign a territory to Georgia Power or Gulf Power, [which] could then receive real-time customer-outage information from dispatchers back at their companies," Ward says. Also, a recent increase in the number of Southern Company trucks equipped with laptops—through a program called automated resource management system—allowed service-restoration teams to receive work orders without paper delays.

IT's other high-priority customers during the storm-restoration process are our call centers, which fielded 949,093 calls from Aug. 29 to Sept. 1. Before Katrina hit Mississippi, four call-center agents from Mississippi Power came to Montgomery, Ala., to take calls. As Katrina approached, the Mississippi call center was evacuated and customer calls that couldn't be handled by the automated VRU system were answered by the relocated employees.

"The call-center communications network is built to support a virtual call center, allowing agents to answer calls from any company location," says Bart Wood, Georgia Power CIO. Technology such as the data network, telecommunications infrastructure, and customer information system makes this possible. "If not for the technology, customers would get busy signals."

As of this writing, all electric service has been restored to Southern Company customers who can receive it. Mississippi Power beat its projection by two weeks. It may take up to three months to restore operations to the 1,051 megawatt Plant Watson, but we feel lucky, as we lost no Southern Company employees, and as we look to the devastation in New Orleans.

"Information technology is like breathing," says Alabama Power president and CEO Charles McCrary. "You don't really think about it, but without it you can't survive. The quick response of the IT team in re-establishing our communications and systems and making them field-available was key to our quick restoration of electrical service."

I'm sure we'll be sending crews to help in the restoration of Louisiana, because that's what we do. And IT employees will travel with our crews to make sure they have the technology they need to get the job done.

Julia Harwell Segars is CIO of Alabama Power.

Wireless Week
OCTOBER 1, 2005

Small Carriers Weather the Storm

BY SUE MAREK

Hometown operators say preparation, past experience and a commitment to their communities helped them get their networks back on track after Hurricane Katrina.

Most of Cellular South's stores were open, but where they were closed, the company set up tents with generators where people could make free calls and re-charge their phone batteries.

When Hurricane Katrina blasted ashore on Aug. 29, Hu Meena, president of Cellular South, was ensconced in the company's Biloxi, Miss., headquarters. Corporate personnel had been sent home for the day due to the storm, but Meena and a few others stayed in a conference room

– staffers refer to it as the "War Room" – tracking the storm and keeping tabs on the network.

Every hour on the hour, technicians would call a bridge number and provide a status check on the company's various tower sites and switches, which are spread across parts of Alabama, Florida, Mississippi and Tennessee. As the storm moved through the Gulf Coast region, Meena and his staff became increasingly concerned about one technician in Biloxi who hadn't reported in for quite some time. After several hours, the technician, Bruce Utley, called to report that he and his family were fine, but a fallen tree had destroyed his home.

Despite his family's losses, Utley had taken the time to check a Cellular South tower site, right after moving his family to a local shelter. The site was without power so he quickly started the generator and within minutes, he had a cellular signal and was able to make that critical call to Biloxi to let Meena and others know his status. Not only was he able to make that important call, so were many others like him who were without wireless service because of the downed site.

This kind of dedication to the job is not unusual among employees of regional operators, where workers often are friends and neighbors with their customers. "These are the times when the customers rely on us," Meena says. "When a storm moves through an area, there are a million excuses for why you can't restore service. It has to be more than a business interest to propel you to restore service. That's where guys like us have a big advantage. This is our home."

EXTRA STEPS Regional operators in the Gulf Coast are certainly no strangers to hurricanes and tropical storms. SouthernLINC Wireless, a division of Southern Company that operates an iDEN network in Alabama, Georgia, southeast Mississippi and parts of Florida, had planned carefully for the possibility of a huge storm. The company even built some cell sites that stand on piers above the flood plain so they can withstand storm surges such as those experienced by Hurricane Camille in 1969. Although a few of those sites flooded after Katrina, the company's foresight and planning helped it minimize its losses.

On Sept. 1, just two days after Katrina hit the coast, 98 percent of the company's sites were up and running. And just a little more than a week after Katrina, SouthernLINC had all of its existing sites on air plus one new site in Mobile, Ala. That site was not planned before Katrina but became necessary to build after damage from the storm left the local power company without any communications.

Some outages, according Bob Dawson, president and CEO of SouthernLINC Wireless, resulted from problems in the landline backhaul connections from the cell sites to the switch. The

A man in Bay St. Louis, Miss., takes advantage of Cellular South's service. For many people who came to the carrier's tents, it was the first time they talked with loved ones since the hurricane.

Without a phone to store his numbers, a Mississippi Gulf Coast resident relied on old-fashioned paper when he used Cellular South's free calling service.

company was able to get those sites up and running quickly thanks to its backup microwave backhaul technology. Dawson says only two SouthernLINC cell sites were out of service because of flooding and the company quickly deployed cell sites on wheels (COWs) to compensate for those outages.

Cellular South's network was fully operational by Sept. 9. Like SouthernLINC, Cellular South had problems with its landline backhaul. Meena says dealing with the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina made him realize that the wireless industry is too dependent upon landline systems. "Some critical links went down," he says.

When it came to tower sites, Cellular South wasn't as lucky as SouthernLINC. The company had two towers on the Mississippi Gulf Coast that were completely demolished by the storm. They both will have to be rebuilt. Still, Meena is happy that just two were lost. "Two towers out of 54 towers that are on the Gulf Coast isn't bad."

The Biloxi, Miss., home of Cellular South network technician Bruce Utley was destroyed when a 50-foot oak tree crashed down on it. No one was hurt, and as soon as he moved his family to a safe place, he got on the road to start generators at the company's cell sites.

Both Meena and Dawson credit their companies' quick recoveries to advance preparations, such as stocking extra generators and outfitting cell sites with extra fuel. "Power is always a concern after a storm," Meena says.

UNIQUE SOLUTIONS Advance preparation may be critical, but so is quick thinking and creative problem solving.

Cellular South enlisted the help of its fellow regional wireless operators. Meena says that when he realized the enormity of the storm, he sent out a plea for help to members of the Associated Carrier Group, an alliance of independent operators that collaborate with each other on handsets and infrastructure gear. Within days, Midwest Wireless and First Cellular of Southern Illinois sent technicians and trucks filled with fuel and generators. Meena also received technical assistance from Cellular South vendors Nortel Networks and Lucent Technologies.

SouthernLINC quickly solved a unique problem when it found out that calls in the 228 area code couldn't connect due to problems with the local landline switch. Because many SouthernLINC customers live in the 228 area code, the company quickly provisioned those customers' phones with a second line that had an 800 number so they could send and receive calls. The company provisioned the 800 number over the air and sent voicemail messages to all those customers notifying them of their second line and the new 800 number. "We were able to add a second number to their phone on the fly and send them a message letting them know they could call out and receive calls with this number," Dawson says.

"Two towers out of 54 towers that are on the Gulf Coast isn't bad.
HU MEENA, *president of Cellular South*

The company's Instant LINC walkie-talkie service, as well as its mobile-to-mobile cellular calls, were unaffected by Hurricane Katrina, which Dawson says has helped reinforce the importance of the company's service, particularly to public safety officials. "We are

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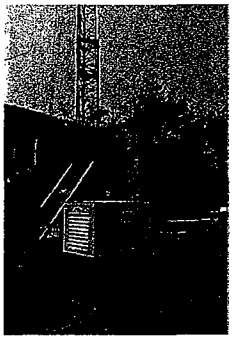
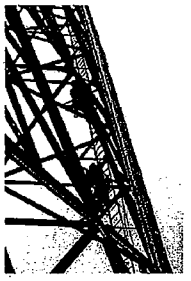
Small Carriers, *continued from page 19*

adding capacity and bringing on new customers, particularly in the government and public safety," he says.

TRAFFIC INCREASES Both Cellular South and SouthernLINC have seen traffic on their networks surge in the aftermath of the storm. Some traffic is from new customers who have switched service providers and some are landline customers who have ported to wireless. However, the majority of that usage comes from roaming revenue. Cellular South alone has seen a 256-percent increase in the number of minutes carried on behalf of other carriers' customers since the storm.





Cellular South rolled out COWs (far left) immediately after the storm, which also required tower repairs. Amid scenes of destruction along the Gulf (bottom left), the carrier stocked up on supplies for employees.

Dawson anticipates that SouthernLINC traffic will remain heavy as public safety, emergency management and government officials use the company's service while they help restore the area. In addition, the company expects that all of the construction firms that are rebuilding the area will be big users of SouthernLINC service. "When you look at the damage, you realize that it will take a tremendous amount of effort to rebuild. And a lot of our customers will be doing that rebuilding," Dawson says.

When it comes to quick recoveries from disasters like Hurricane Katrina, the small, regional operators definitely stand apart from their larger counterparts when it comes to commitment to their communities, advance preparations and building on past experience. "Because we are regional, we have people local to the area who are there before, during and after every disaster," Dawson says. "That makes a huge difference." WW

FCC Takes Post-Katrina Stock

BY MARK ROCKWELL

Scope of recovery business clearer at FCC.

WASHINGTON–The recovery of the communications networks in the Gulf Coast states stricken by Hurricane Katrina depends on a number of business concessions and details that allow more latitude for carriers in their efforts, say executives and regulators involved in the task.

Some of the stark details of what faces telecom carriers came to light at the FCC's September meeting, which convened at BellSouth's emergency control center in Atlanta. At the meeting, executives from wireless, wireline, broadcasting companies and regulatory agencies revealed some of the details in their joint recovery efforts in Alabama, Louisiana and Mississippi.

Carrier officials, like Rod Odom, president, Network Services, BellSouth Corporation, told FCC commissioners that his company was greatly aided by the FCC's suspension of temporary authority (or STAs) order. That enabled carriers to get alternative transmission facilities like microwave backhaul and trunking in place; otherwise, getting such approvals takes weeks or months.

Wireless networks used STAs particularly well in establishing microwave backhaul links to support wireless traffic in the areas, Odom said.

The FCC also suspended some other regulatory filing requirements for wireless carriers, and some operational rules, said Odom, which sped up some recovery efforts. The agency has remained open seven days a week, 24 hours a day, since the storm went through to aid telecommunications companies restoring their networks.

The FCC's extensive hours and aid has facilitated recovery of wireless and wireline network capacity in the stricken areas to return to about 75 percent of pre-hurricane levels, said Ken Moran, director of homeland security at the FCC.

In the hours after the storm, about 1,000 wireless sites were out of commission, and many switches were down, Moran said. Three million wired phone lines were out, and 41 broadcast stations were off the air. The business of getting those facilities up and running was "extreme," he said.

The effort to do so sounds exhausting. Odom said carriers, wireless and wireline, hold at least one conference call every day. Those calls, along with the FCC's computerized outage reporting system, allow government and carriers to better coordinate, Moran said.

BellSouth, a Cingular Wireless parent company, had other problems in the storm with wireless sites that needed refueling, along with key wireline central offices that were threatened by flooding and lawlessness. Odom said his company sent boats with technicians into flooded neighborhoods to examine downed wireless sites and determine where those microwave links were needed. The company's critical wireline switching center on Poydras street had to be abandoned by BellSouth personnel. The site, deemed a critical key to the recovery effort in the city, was guarded by FBI agents for a period of time amid growing civil unrest.

CTIA President and CEO Steve Largent said in his testimony that wireless carriers were – like other businesses in the area – strapped in the early hours after the storm in just finding their employees and making sure they were safe. In many cases, wireless company employees had lost everything, he said. They did, however, continue to go to work and help restore wireless networks.

Largent said wireless carriers' daily coordination efforts were "unprecedented" in scope.

FCC Chairman Kevin Martin proposed some additional business help to carriers in the region, including $200 million of universal service funding funneled through existing programs to aid the area. The program would provide those using FEMA disaster assistance with support for wireless handsets and a package of 300 free minutes of service for evacuees and people still in the affected area.

Martin also said the commission would allow health care providers in the region, including Red Cross shelters, to apply for telecom support aide at bigger discounts. He also said the commission would open a new funding window to re-connect schools to the Internet in the area, and has suggested the establishment of an expert panel of public safety and communications industry executives to examine how the storm affected the network infrastructure. WW

The little company that could
By Dennis Cauchon,
USA TODAY

GULFPORT, Miss. — Melvin Wilson, 46, a marketing manager for Mississippi Power, was reviewing next year's advertising campaign when Hurricane Katrina turned toward Mississippi.

Brian Kalb of Baltimore works to repair an electrical line for Mississippi Power.

By H. Darr Beiser, USA TODAY

A day later, the marketing man was "director of storm logistics," responsible for feeding and housing 11,000 repairmen from 24 states and Canada. **(Photo gallery:** Power struggle in Mississippi)

He needed nurses, beds, meals, tetanus shots, laundry service, showers, toilets and much more — and he needed them now. And he needed double the quantities called for in the company's "worst-case scenario." And he needed them in places that had no electricity, no plumbing, no phones, few road signs and sporadic looting.

Headquarters: Gulfport, Miss.
Employees: 1,250
Customers: 195,000
2004 revenue: $910 million
2004 net income: $77 million
Parent company: Southern Co. of Atlanta
Mississippi Power's damage from Hurricane Katrina
Repair costs: $245 million to $295 million
Customers without power: 100%
Transmission and distribution facilities lost: 65%
Generating capacity available: 3%
Power lines: 1,000 miles down

Poles: 8,900 down
Transmission towers: 300 damaged
Corporate headquarters: Unusable for months
Employees: All survived. More than half suffered substantial damage to their homes; 75 lost homes completely.

Sources: Mississippi Power, Southern Co.

The fact that Wilson didn't have a working phone was his tough luck: If he failed, men would go hungry, hospitals would stay dark and the suffering of his community would endure. "My day job did not prepare me for this," says Wilson, his voice choked with emotion, recalling the burden of having 11,000 mouths to feed.

Let it be told: Wilson got the job done. So did his colleagues. And how they restored power in just 12 days is one of the great modern crisis-management stories.

While the government struggled to organize a bus convoy in New Orleans, Mississippi Power successfully executed a swift, ambitious disaster plan. The company provided its own security, communications, fuel, food and sanitation. The manpower deployed was equal in size to an Army division.

The story of this relatively small 1,250-employee corporate subsidiary reveals how much can be done quickly when it's managed right. "I could not be prouder of our response," says David Ratcliffe, chief executive of Southern Co. (SO), the Atlanta-based utility that owns Mississippi Power.

Operating in the harshest of circumstances — its corporate headquarters destroyed, its disaster response center flooded, all 195,000 customers without power — Mississippi Power restored power to all customers who could safely take electricity by the symbolic day of Sept. 11. The 12-day repair effort was completed far ahead of the original four-week schedule.

Mississippi Power benefited from a strategy refined by years of hurricane experience. Southern Co.'s five electric companies — all located in hurricane-prone southeastern states — work together during storms and share lessons afterward.

When Katrina hit, Mississippi Power management responded with a style designed for speed and flexibility, for getting things done amid confusion and chaos.

The key elements to success:

A can-do corporate culture.

Southern Co.'s corporate values are written on employees' IDs: Unquestionable Trust, Superior Performance, Total Commitment. These simple rules, called Southern Style,

went from platitude to practice during the crisis. For example, "unquestionable trust" made second-guessing a corporate no-no.

Mississippi Power also had steeped its culture in Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. The company's training building, the Covey Center, flooded during the storm. But Covey-speak — "win-win," "be proactive," etc. — survived as a lubricant to quick action and on-the-spot innovation.

Clear lines of responsibility.

In contrast to the government's disaster response, Mississippi Power made absolutely clear who had responsibility and authority for each task. Long before the storm, the company had 20 "storm directors" with crystal-clear assignments: transmission lines, logistics, security, etc. Those responsible could not hide in a bureaucracy.

The man responsible for procuring 140,000 gallons of fuel a day in a time of extreme shortages? That's him, the man in the baseball cap, Rufus Smith, storm director for the supply chain. Smith and other directors had broad power backed by "unquestionable trust" from their superiors. "I don't have to ask permission," says Wilson. "If I need 2,000 cots and find some, I say, 'Roll the trucks.' "

Decentralized decision-making.

Twenty years ago, hurricane response was run from the top down: Top executives looked at the power system holistically and set priorities from headquarters. Today, decision-making has been pushed far down the command structure, to the level of the electrical substation, a distribution point that serves perhaps 5,000 people. Crews report to substations with broad authority and a simple mission: Get the power on.

Even out-of-state line crews, hired on contract and working unsupervised, were empowered to engineer their own solutions. The results were entrepreneurial. One crew chief stripped a generator off an ice machine to get a substation working. Other crews scavenged parts from fallen poles. Costly purchases were made instantly over the phone.

The strategy worked even better than top management expected. "We had greater storm damage than originally thought, but this structure made things happen faster than we expected. People were getting more done," says Mississippi Power President Anthony Topazi.

Company procedures were less important than the ability to improvise.

Mississippi Power's hurricane response manual is 4 inches thick. When Katrina struck, the manual played its traditional role: none. "I haven't looked at in years," admits Robert Powell, storm director for damage assessment and a 35-year company veteran. "If you don't know what you're supposed to do, the manual is not going to help now."

The most valuable document was a phone directory: the names and numbers of people who could get things done.

Lesson 1: Think ahead — A good forecast pays off

Robert Powell, a power line project manager, is the company's weatherman when a hurricane threatens. Mississippi Power subscribes to three weather-forecasting services. As the storm approached, Powell talked to meteorologists and examined computer projections. The engineer and self-taught weather expert bet correctly that Coastal Weather Research Center at the University of South Alabama had the most accurate forecast. "They've had the hot hand this year predicting storm paths," Powell says.

Powell told storm directors that Hurricane Katrina could slice a diagonal path through the heart of Mississippi Power's 23-county service area and cause more flooding than official forecasts.

"The computer models don't take into account a quirk in geography that affects our territory," he says. The quirk: Boot-shaped Louisiana sticks out underneath part of Mississippi. "Louisiana acted like a dam, pushing water into Mississippi and creating a storm surge that was twice what the models predicted," he says.

With Powell's assessment in hand and the storm 24 hours away, the company retreated from its primary storm center in its high-rise headquarters on the beach in Gulfport to a backup office at a power plant about five miles inland.

Hurricane Katrina officially landed at 6:10 a.m. Aug. 29.

At noon, the backup storm command center lost power. The giant power plant shut down. A flooded power plant was not in the plan. The company's storm directors, holding flashlights, walked downstairs to look out a small window in a metal door. Cars were floating in the parking lot.

Powell radioed his wife, an officer in the National Guard, that he was OK. He wouldn't speak to her again for six days. "This was more than our worst-case scenario," he says.

Repair trucks were rolling in from out of state as the hurricane pounded Mississippi.

Mississippi Power had pre-positioned 2,400 workers, mostly contract tree trimmers and line crews, in Alabama and Georgia. Combined with its own workforce, Mississippi Power had a force of 3,700 on the ground one day after the hurricane.

Southern Co. procedure called for each subsidiary to run the show on its home turf.

Mississippi Power is a small utility — one-tenth the size of Georgia Power, one-sixth the size of Alabama Power. The company's worst-case scenarios had considered that every customer could lose power, which happened. But the company didn't think it was big

enough to manage an outside repair force of more than 5,000, the number prepared for in the worst-case scenario. "We have never, in our little company's history, used more than 4,000 from outside," says Topazi.

The problem wasn't resources. Southern Co. had net income of $1.5 billion in 2004 and resources to spare.

It was all about managing. And that was Mississippi Power's problem.

Lesson 2: Be prepared — Back up your backup plans

Floodwaters had yet to recede when a company security van came to take the first load of storm directors to the company's third option for a storm center: a service office in North Gulfport that had survived Hurricane Camille in 1969. The company had no fourth option.

The office had survived. It didn't have electricity or running water, but it had a roof and walls. The hurricane response control room was set up in a windowless conference room. Topazi took a small office usually inhabited by a local manager.

Phone lines were down. Cellphones were useless. Police radios were silent.

Mississippi Power had one last option: a unique radio function on its company-issued cellphones. When all else had failed, the company radios worked.

At least some of the time.

Mississippi Power cellphones — sold by SouthernLinc Wireless, another Southern Co. subsidiary — work both as a phone and a radio. The phone function died because cellphones needed outside switches and towers. But radio traffic stayed within the damaged but alive SouthernLinc system.

Mississippi Power had 1,100 working radios for themselves, plus 500 extras to lend out. For the first 72 hours, these radios were virtually the only way to communicate on Mississippi's Gulf Coast. A week later, SouthernLinc put the cellphones' function back in service by cleverly issuing toll-free 800-numbers to the phones. That let callers bypass the overworked switches in the 228 area code. While others struggled to communicate at all, Mississippi Power could hold conference calls with line crews in the field.

Mississippi Power and SouthernLinc worked furiously to increase the system's capacity. Microwave dishes were brought in to bypass other companies' disabled telephone lines and switches. When a crane was late, workers didn't wait. They used ropes and brute strength to string a heavy wire to the tower atop a seven-story building.

Immediately after the storm, though, radio contact was spotty.

Melvin Wilson, the logistics man, tried for 12 hours to reach the outside world. He knew thousands of men already were on their way to Mississippi. Some pre-planned staging areas were flooded or inaccessible. It was unclear what supplies were coming or where they should go.

Finally, his SouthernLinc radio worked.

Lesson 3: Teamwork — How to get help when you need it

Joe Wyse, a Georgia Power manager, sitting at a desk in Atlanta, answered.

"Joe, is that you? Can you help me?" Wilson asked.

"Tell me what you need," Wyse said. "I'm here to help."

Wyse's regular job is benchmarking performance, but he's also Georgia Power's storm director of logistics. His group of three people were Wilson's link to the outside world. As the outside repair force grew from zero to nearly 11,000 in eight days, Wyse went deeper and deeper into his supplier database, contacting vendors as far away as Michigan. His team turned to the Yellow Pages and the Internet, cold-calling vendors to see if they could head immediately to Mississippi.

"Food is not the problem. Specialized needs like showers and laundry are toughest," Wyse says.

Wyse's only limit on what to buy and how much to spend was his good judgment. "You can't do a lot of price shopping when you're in a situation like Katrina, but you watch for price-gougers," Wyse says.

One vendor quoted a sky-high price for setting up showers. As desperately as he needed showers, Wyse turned the offer down. Instead, power company crews built their own shower tent in a parking lot of a former Sunbeam appliance warehouse in Hattiesburg, Miss.

In all, thousands of men were housed at 30 staging areas. Most lived in six full-service tent cities, sleeping in air-conditioned circus tents that held up to 1,800. They ate hot breakfasts at dawn, took box lunches in their trucks and had hot meals at sundown. They showered daily and had their laundry done. They received more than 8,000 tetanus shots.

Wilson worked 20 hours a day. His home was flooded. He didn't see his family for nine days. He sometimes slept on the floor. "I was a logistics man without a bed to sleep in," he says.

Lesson 4: Be clever — Seek breakthrough solutions